

We claim:

1. A method of transacting a sealed bid competition over the Internet, comprising the steps of:

providing a buyer that is intending to purchase by a sealed bid competition with computer-implemented means for originating a "request for bid" communication that includes bid data as well as a parameter of deadline;

providing a plurality of vendors with access to the "request for bid" communication by means of the Internet;

providing those vendors which choose to respond by the deadline with computer-implemented means for responding with "response" communications containing substantive content presumptively responsive to the "request for bid" communication;

providing the buyer with access to the "response" communications by means of the Internet; and

providing a deadline-integrity process such that either the buyer is precluded from access to at least the substantive content of the "response" communications until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline or the buyer's activity with accessing at least the substantive content of the "response" communications is logged so that such log record can thereafter disclose if the buyer voluntarily restrained itself from accessing at least the substantive content of the "response" communications until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline;

whereby the integrity of the sealed bid competition as transacted over the Internet is upheld at least in part by said deadline-integrity process.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the deadline-integrity process comprises providing an intermediary Internet resource to which the responding vendors commit the "response" communications, such that the intermediary Internet resource can either (i) preclude the buyer's access to at least the substantive content of the "response" communications until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline or (ii) log the buyer's activity with at least the substantive content of the "response" communications so that such log record can thereafter disclose if the buyer voluntarily restrained itself from accessing at least the substantive content of the "response" communications until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein:

the intermediary Internet resource comprises one or more Internet sites.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the computer-implemented means for responding includes encrypting the "response" communications such that decryption requires access to a specific decryption key; and

the deadline-integrity process comprises providing a trusted party with said specific decryption key, such that said trusted party can either (i) preclude the buyer's access to said specific decryption key until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline or (ii) log the buyer's activity with said specific decryption key so that such log record can thereafter disclose if the buyer voluntarily restrained itself from accessing said specific decryption key until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the trusted party comprises an intermediary Internet resource, which may include one or more Internet sites.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the computer-implemented means for responding includes encoding or compressing the "response" communications such that decoding or decompressing requires access to a specific decoding or decompressing object; and

the deadline-integrity process comprises providing a trusted party with said decoding or decompressing object, such that said trusted party can either (i) preclude the buyer's access to said decoding or decompressing object until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline or (ii) log the buyer's activity with said decoding or decompressing object so that such log record can thereafter disclose if the buyer voluntarily restrained itself from accessing said decoding or decompressing object until the lapse of some time determined from the deadline.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein:

decoding or decompressing objects can comprise any of passwords, algorithms, or hyper-link branches to an Internet address.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein:

wherein the log record is committed to machines of the buyer's at the instance(s) of the buyer's accessing activities with respect to the "response" communications such that the log record is undesirably vulnerable to unauthorized deletion, corruption or other manipulation.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the "request for bid" communication is contained in one or more web pages.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the lapse of some time determined from the deadline means a time concurrent with or later than the deadline.

11. A method using the Internet to transact an online, public unsealing event in a sealed bid competition, comprising the steps of:

providing a buyer that is intending to purchase by a sealed bid competition with computer-implemented means for originating a "request for bid" communication which includes bid data as well as a parameter of deadline associated with a public unsealing event;

providing a plurality of vendors with access to the "request for bid" communication by means of the Internet;

providing those vendors which choose to respond by the deadline with computer-implemented means for responding with "response" communications containing substantive content presumptively responsive to the "request for bid" communication;

providing an intermediary Internet resource to which the responding vendors commit the "response" communications; and,

providing the buyer with a web meeting resource by which the buyer holds the public unsealing event at some time associated with the deadline for the sake of a real-time web-meeting audience which admits at least the responding vendors, wherein the public unsealing event comprises the buyer accessing all the "response" communications — the buyer's preclusion to access being lifted by then — such that the content of which is available for viewing by the web-meeting audience.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein:

the web meeting resource comprises one or more Internet services providing web conferencing or web collaboration utilities.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein:

the "request for bid" communication is contained in one or more web pages.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein:

the activity of the buyer accessing all the "response" communications causes the content of which to be displayed [in a spreadsheet], which is what is viewed by the web-meeting audience.

15. A method of transacting a procurement event over the Internet by means of a web meeting resource, which procurement event emulates a sealed bid competition, comprising the steps of:

providing a buyer that is intending to purchase by a sealed bid competition with a web meeting resource which admits an audience comprising at least prospective vendors;

providing the buyer with computer-implemented means for originating a "request for bid" communication for publishing during a given web meeting session which includes bid data as well as a parameter of deadline;

providing the prospective vendors with access to the "request for bid" communication during the given web meeting session;

providing those vendors which choose to respond by the deadline with computer-implemented means for responding with one round of a "response" communication containing substantive content presumptively responsive to the "request for bid" communication; and

providing an intermediary Internet resource to which the responding vendors commit their "response" communications to preclude the buyer or any other party from accessing at least the substantive content of any "response" communication except one's own until some time determined from the deadline.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein:
the steps comprising the vendors responding occurs before the close of the given web-meeting session.
17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:
before the close of the web-meeting session and upon some time determined from the deadline, the buyer providing a public unsealing event for the sake of the real-time web-meeting audience, wherein the public unsealing event comprises the buyer accessing all the "response" communications — the buyer's preclusion to access being lifted by then — such that the content of which is available for viewing by the web-meeting audience.
18. The method of claim 16, wherein:
the activity of the buyer accessing all the "response" communications causes the content of which to be displayed (in a spreadsheet,) which at least is some of what is viewed by the web-meeting audience.
19. The method of claim 15, wherein:
the buyer and any of the vendors may periodically check-in or -out of the given web-meeting session during its run.
20. The method of claim 15, wherein:
the "request for bid" communication is contained in one or more web pages, and publishing comprises making the web page(s) of the buyer simultaneously displayable on the displays of the web-meeting audience.
21. The method of claim 15, wherein:
the web meeting resource comprises one or more Internet services providing web conferencing or web collaboration utilities.